



downtown

Overview

Downtown Bloomington is a vibrant, historic, and flourishing center of the community. Downtown offers many things for Bloomington residents, employees, and visitors alike. Traditionally, downtowns have served as central hubs of activity. Across the United States, downtowns continue to grow, adapt, and evolve in a variety of ways that make them unique, lively, diverse, and safe places. Due to varying strategies toward growth and planning, some cities have achieved greater levels of success than others. Currently, many in the community believe that Downtown Bloomington is doing quite well and consider it the heart of the city. This was not always the case. Not long ago, Downtown Bloomington seemed to be in decline and losing its significance as the center of local commerce and activity.

Developing and enhancing policies that ensure the long-term success of Downtown can enrich Bloomington as a whole. Nationally, Main Street trends show a surge in small business startups, a wide-range of social media applications used to engage and build loyal customer bases, and a prominent role of food within the downtown marketplace. Movements ranging from offering high-quality snacks in hotel lobbies to opening locally sourced, “farm to fork” restaurants are making significant contributions to the life and vitality of

downtowns. Placemaking continues to shape the physical characteristics of downtowns with additional focus on human-scaled design and streets that are walkable, bikeable, and safe for users of all ages. This approach not only supports the commercial and retail aspects of downtown areas but also improves livability as people continue to seek living options within city centers. Downtown Bloomington has recently undergone significant student housing growth, while local and national trends indicate Millennials and Baby Boomers also find the Downtown a great place to live, work, and play.

Successful downtowns are integrally linked to the economic health of local businesses, which are the foundation of the local economy and serve the needs of residents and visitors alike. Because local owners live in the community they do business in, they are free to make decisions based on local needs rather than on corporate policies handed down from decision-makers far removed. Additionally, studies have shown that independent, local owners spend more money at other local businesses creating a “multiplier effect”: Money recirculates within the community rather than “leaking out” to remote corporate headquarters or centralized purchasing departments. Listed below are some examples of how locally owned businesses are good for a city’s long-term viability. They provide a perspective on sustaining Downtown Bloomington.



- **Buy Local – Support Yourself:** Several studies have shown that when you buy from an independent, locally owned business rather than from a nationally owned business, significantly more of your money is used to make purchases from other local businesses, service providers, and farms. For example, for every \$100 spent in locally owned, independent stores, \$68 returns to the community through taxes, payroll, and other expenditures. The same amount spent in a national chain, returns only \$43 locally; and with online spending, almost nothing is returned to the community.
- **Support Community Groups:** Non-profit organizations receive an average 250% more support from smaller, locally owned businesses than they do from national businesses.
- **Keep The Community Unique:** The one-of-a-kind businesses are an integral part of the distinctive character of Bloomington. Tourism increases as visitors seek out destinations that offer them the sense of being someplace, not just anyplace.
- **Reduce Environmental Impact:** Locally owned businesses can make more local purchases requiring less transportation and contributing less to sprawl, congestion, habitat loss, and pollution.
- **Create More Good Jobs:** Small, locally owned businesses are the largest employers nationally offering jobs to residents.
- **Get Better Service:** Locally owned businesses often hire people with a better understanding of the products they are selling and who take more time to get to know customers.
- **Invest In Community:** Locally owned businesses have owners and employees who live in the community, are less likely to leave, and are vested in the community's future.
- **Create an Age-Friendly Business Environment:** Older adults are generally more loyal to local businesses when the environment is accessible and employees are trained to value and work sensitively with older customers. Older employees have been shown to demonstrate a strong work ethic. Older shop owners will be less likely to abandon their businesses upon retirement if their legacy can be passed to apprentices supported through local economic development activity.

Sense of Place

Density is of principal importance to Downtown Bloomington's sense of place. As density continues to increase, however, a balance needs to be struck between student-centric development and mixed-use Downtown amenities that support the entire community. In the year 2000, there were just over 1,800 residential units located in Downtown. Today, with roughly 1,900 units added; the number of units has more than doubled to 3,700 as more people are choosing to live Downtown. Allowing relatively higher housing densities through zoning, plus a very strong multifamily rental market (featuring occupancy rates well over 90 percent), has significantly driven the Downtown housing market. Almost all of this residential growth has been targeted to Indiana University's off-campus student housing demand, a result that has triggered concerns that Downtown's socioeconomic makeup has become too homogenous. This high rate of student demand has driven up rental prices per square foot, and it appears to have priced many non-student households out of the Downtown market. Moving ahead, senior resident, workforce, and affordable housing options must be part of the housing solutions for Downtown Bloomington. The inadvertent centralization of student housing around Downtown could weaken the community's strong and inclusive atmosphere to all age groups. The Housing and Neighborhoods Chapter covers applicable housing issues that should also not be overlooked for Downtown Bloomington. It is important that Bloomington continue to support a diverse and robust Downtown that is neither made up of purely student-centric businesses nor dominated by multifamily student housing. Bloomington's Downtown has a rich sense of place that is key to the continued success of the city and Indiana University alike.

Moving ahead, senior resident, workforce, and affordable housing options must be part of the housing solutions for Downtown Bloomington. We must beware of gentrification which removes older, affordable housing options and replaces them with new, high-priced housing options.

Main Street Corridors

Downtown is a highly walkable district that is enhanced by a mix of commercial, entertainment, residential, and cultural amenities with robust multimodal access. Along with changes in Downtown housing, changes in hospitality, entertainment, transportation, and commercial establishments continue to

enhance Downtown. There are grocery stores that provide everyday items. Over 700 hotel rooms welcome overnight visitors to stay, shop, and enjoy a walkable Downtown. Plus over 900 businesses featuring retail, restaurants, and professional services – each sector topping over 100 establishments – offer a wide variety of choices for customers and also signify a healthy local economy. Through a joint venture between Bloomington Transit and the Central Emergency Dispatch Center, a new, all-in-one central transit station and emergency dispatch facility was built along South Walnut Street and 3rd St. The project included extensive streetscape improvements along South Walnut Street. This has transformed South Walnut into a more pedestrian-friendly and lively area. Parking meters returned and deserve mention, as vehicular parking demands have increased relative to a limited public parking supply. By some metrics, a parking 'problem' is a good indicator of a vibrant downtown.

Several galleries and venues, such as the Bloomington Playwrights Project and the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, along with an array of locally owned bars and restaurants, offer many arts and entertainment options. Ivy Tech Community College purchased the John Waldron Arts Center, a move that added another important player to the Downtown arts community. The Monroe County Convention Center regularly books conventions, trade shows, professional training seminars, special events, and even religious services, which, combined, have brought more than 1.2 million people into Downtown since it first opened in 1991. The Farmer's Market, Fourth Street Festival of the Arts, Lotus World Music & Arts Festival, Taste of Bloomington, and the Fourth of July parade are all long-standing events in Downtown. Clearing the way for anticipated technology-based employment in the Certified Technology Park and incorporated "Trades District," the recent clearance of vacant warehouses north of City Hall is another positive sign for further business and residential growth in Downtown. These are just a few highlights that demonstrate change, vitality, and positive opportunities for increased business investment and residential livability of Downtown Bloomington.

Design

Downtown Bloomington has a certain aesthetic that continues to define its character. Since the adoption of the last Comprehensive Plan, architecture, parking, historic preservation, student housing, an emerging population of persons experiencing homelessness, employment,

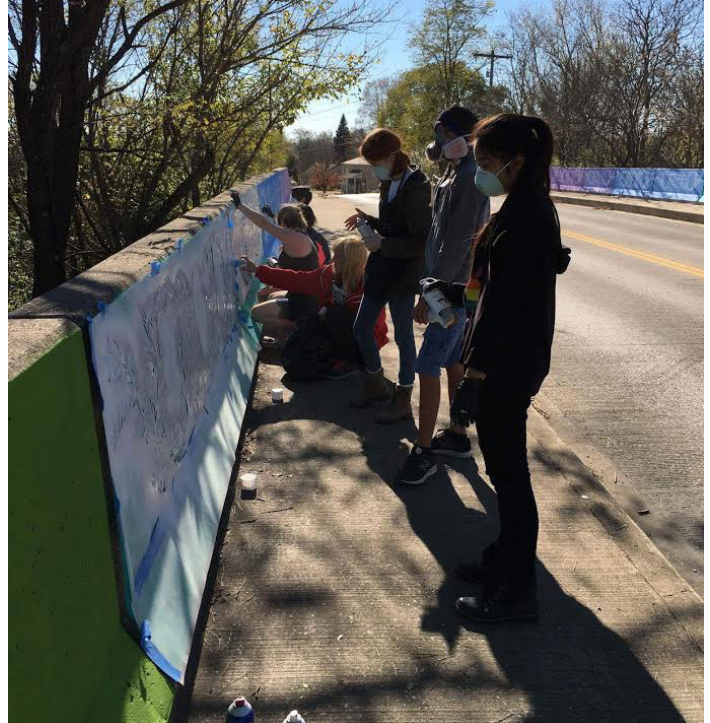
hotels, convention center expansion, retail mix, and other hot topic issues have played out. These issues are good proxies for Downtown's vibrancy. They stimulate a continuous community dialogue among residents, businesses, and visitors over the look and feel of Downtown. This look and feel is especially important in regards to both real and perceived safety concerns. Public discourse, information exchange, and positive economic change are good ways to channel this energy into practices that will sustain Downtown's prominence as the inclusive heart of Bloomington.

Attitudes of complacency and standardization can begin to erode Downtown's success and should be avoided. The 2005 Downtown Vision and Infill Strategy Plan, developed as a result of the 2002 Growth Policies Plan, established character areas and helped to better guide specific building design and architecture features. The character areas described in that plan became overlay districts in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which created height, design, and bulk regulations for each character area. These regulations have helped to shape many of the newer developments in Downtown. However, details on building height, mass, design, and uses are coming under scrutiny as Downtown continues to grow and evolve. Avoiding standardized templates or boilerplate proposals for new building projects recognizes the need for alternative compliance with the UDO and much clearer policy guidance for each character area. Form-based codes and/or fine-tuning of design guidelines, building height, massing, and other site details, such as the ability for student-oriented housing to be adaptively reused for other market segments, are in order as Bloomington moves forward. The community also cannot lose sight of the need to better define its expectations for the Downtown public realm. After all, an active and lively public realm is what makes downtowns so unique. Guiding new developments in these areas will help Downtown maintain and strengthen its economic vitality and visual attractiveness as a great place to be.

Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District (BEAD)

BEAD is a geographically defined, mixed-use, cultural district in Downtown Bloomington. It encompasses entertainment and arts amenities that positively influence the quality of life and sense of place for the entire community.

Downtown Bloomington intersects and enhances the performing and visual arts venues at Indiana University to create a regional arts center accessible to all. The Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District was conceived as an economic development project, and the Indiana Arts Commission has designated it as an official Cultural District.



It acts as the promotional hub for a robust festival and events scene that draws thousands of people, both locally and regionally. BEAD seeks to bring the business and creative sectors together to advance commerce and culture, build community, and spur economic development. It emphasizes the high concentration of creative assets and related activities to strengthen and enhance the overall economic development of the community. BEAD links a variety of incentive programs and grants to benefit the community and visitors as well as the small business, creative cultural, and entertainment sectors.

With so many artists, artisans, and talented craftspeople calling Bloomington home, the community has become a strong arts hub. According to the 2012 Americans for the Arts study, Bloomington's non-profit arts sector contributes \$72.3 million to the local economy annually through direct spending by arts organizations and their audiences. In addition, this sector supports 3,430 full-time equivalent jobs and generates nearly \$6.3 million in local and state government revenues. The City of Bloomington has been actively working to leverage these economic benefits through promotion and assistance programs.

Trades District

The Trades District is within Bloomington's Certified Tech Park. This district, located just northwest of City Hall, is a prime redevelopment site and a rare opportunity to revitalize a key component of the City's core. The Trades District offers an excellent opportunity to attract new private investment and jobs to the core of the community. This has the potential to begin diversifying the predominantly service-oriented employment base of Downtown with more technical and entrepreneurial business start-up jobs. Accordingly, the City of Bloomington and its Redevelopment Commission have begun planning efforts to create a new business incubator in the Dimension Mill building located within the Trades District. The Dimension Mill project should help catalyze private investment and job creation in the district.

One of the main goals of the Trades District is to create jobs in the technology sector. The Trades District is planned to develop organically over time, with new businesses as a primary use and work force focused residences to help serve and support those businesses. Finally, the Trades District will be environmentally sensitive, with stormwater and green building designs that will highlight how future developments in and outside of the Trades District can be developed that are energy efficient, environmentally low-impact, and provide positive economic results for private job growth and investment.

Conference Center Area

Bloomington's conference center is a strong Downtown anchor and provides a community and regional asset. The Monroe County Convention Center and surrounding properties present another wonderful opportunity for growth of tourism, hospitality jobs, and investment in Downtown Bloomington. A feasibility study, completed in 2012, conducted a trade show schedule survey that illustrated that Bloomington was the second-most-selected conference location in Indiana, behind only the Downtown Indianapolis-Indiana Convention Center. The study also suggested that the conference center could more than double its number of attendees, from 63,000 to roughly 130,000, if it had adequate space to accommodate the demand. To that end, the study identified that an additional 130,000 square feet of



conference space could be supported with an adjoining 200-room hotel. The total capital investment for the convention center expansion was estimated to be \$38.3 million, and the new hotel would be a \$30 million private investment. The economic impact was suggested to be about \$18.3 million annually while creating 260 full-time hospitality related jobs. The streetscape improvements to South Walnut Street have prepared the south side of Downtown for redevelopment. Supporting the expansion of the Monroe County Convention Center in conjunction with a new hotel would further sustain this Downtown anchor through its increased ability to hold events and meetings. Concurrently, this expansion would foster and support more diversified redevelopment interests in this area.

Goals & Policies

Policies in this chapter respond to the adopted 2013 Vision Statement objectives to:

"Nurture our vibrant and historic Downtown as the flourishing center of the community";

"Enhance the community's role as a regional economic hub";

"Provide a safe, efficient, accessible, and connected system of transportation that emphasizes public transit, walking, and biking to enhance options to reduce our overall dependence on the automobile" and to

"Ensure all land development activity makes a positive and lasting community contribution" and to

"Celebrate our rich, eclectic blend of arts, culture, and local businesses."

Goal 4.1 Ensure that the Downtown retains its historic character and small-town feel, encouraging innovative redevelopment that complements and does not detract from its character.

Policy 4.1.1: Ensure that public investments in infrastructure and technology do not detract from historic preservation and that they enhance pedestrian-friendly character in the downtown.

Policy 4.1.2: Recognize the significance of both traditional and innovative, high-quality architecture in supporting community character and urban design.

Goal 4.2 Encourage attractive, cost effective, convenient, and environmentally friendly public and private motor vehicle and bicycle parking facilities.

Policy 4.2.1: Provide sufficient bicycle and vehicular parking in the immediate Downtown area to support vibrant economic activity.

Policy 4.2.2: Update City policies and codes as necessary to address the needs and impacts of emerging forms of transportation like ride sharing, autonomous vehicles, and electric vehicles.

Policy 4.2.3: Design vehicle parking areas in light of potential changing mobility solutions, and to reduce stormwater runoff, increase compatibility with street trees, and add visual interest to streets and other public locations.

Policy 4.2.4: Address the special parking needs of downtown churches and social service organizations through creative and collaborative solutions.

Goal 4.3 Integrate housing, entertainment, employment, shopping, and commerce in a way that promotes walking, biking, and transit for all ages and abilities.

Policy 4.3.1: Create opportunities for an enhanced residential, retail, and restaurant presence within Downtown that caters to a diverse range of residents and visitors.

Policy 4.3.2: Collaborate with Indiana University and Downtown Bloomington, Inc., to integrate planning efforts.

Goal 4.4 Encourage a range of diverse housing types downtown, with an emphasis on affordable and workforce housing.

Policy 4.4.1: Work with social service agencies and state and federal grant sources to incentivize the development of housing for lower-income individuals and families.

Policy 4.4.2: When considering redevelopment petitions, weigh the benefits of more affordable housing in existing buildings against the benefits of building new structures with more expensive residential units.

Programs

Downtown Vitality and Sense of Place

- Develop measures that limit the pace and extent of student housing in Downtown to steer market forces towards more non-student and affordable housing opportunities.
- Conduct a retail market assessment to identify what is currently missing, based on market demand, in the Downtown landscape to help encourage more retail diversity and promote business development.
- Assist local businesses with means of securing additional financial capital to expand and/or remain in Downtown.
- Create targeted marketing of Downtown in regional markets towards capturing new businesses, as well as those that are considering relocating to Bloomington.
- Develop partnerships with Downtown Bloomington, Inc., the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, Indiana University, and local real estate organizations to identify potential Downtown redevelopment sites.
- Utilize the City of Bloomington's Gigabit-class fiber Internet services to promote and increase both Downtown business and visitor activity.
- Draft an updated future land use study and facility needs assessment (10-15 year outlook) for the Monroe County Convention Center.
- Ensure that all affordable housing developments proposed for the Trades District or anywhere else in the Downtown area have an age- and ability-friendly component.
- Ensure ADA compliance in public spaces and incentivize universal design in private spaces to assure the built environment will serve a market of all ages and abilities.

- Consult with stakeholders to considering the installation of public restrooms downtown.

Downtown Design

- Update and revise the Downtown overlay districts with “form-based code” building forms and massing that relate to the street and the pedestrian, whether through traditional architectural forms or innovative new designs.
- Provide guidance for urban design guidelines using an architectural inventory of celebrated structures currently in the Downtown area.
- Investigate the option of a design or architectural review committee for Downtown approvals.
- Update the Historic Preservation Commission’s 2012 Preservation Plan for Historic Bloomington.
- Enact preservation measures on targeted buildings or areas in Downtown, as identified in future versions of the Preservation Plan for Historic Bloomington.
- Prioritize opportunities for streetscape and other public improvements that enhance Downtown focus areas and gateways.

Downtown Transportation and Parking

- Continue to improve multimodal connectivity with the Downtown area.
- Promote programs to encourage bike sharing and car sharing among employees or residents within specific districts.
- Develop a Parking Management Plan/Program for the Downtown area that supports alternative transportation modes.
- Work with the City’s Parking Commission to implement Downtown parking strategies and policies.
- Encourage covered vehicle parking in parking lots or structures through the use of tree canopies or photo-voltaic solar panel canopies.
- Task the Parking Commission and Plan Commission to undertake a joint planning study that develops guidelines and innovative approaches for improving the aesthetics of Downtown public parking and open space/common areas.
- Encourage covered bicycle parking for visitors downtown.

Outcomes & Indicators

Outcome: Downtown events are frequent and well attended.

- Number of Downtown public events
- Number of Downtown events visited by both residents and non-residents
- Number of Downtown events visited by attendees, by age range
- Parking turnover and utilization rates

Outcome: The Downtown business environment is vibrant and sustainable.

- Retail Revenue
- Restaurant Revenue
- Employment levels and salary and wage levels
- Downtown safety incidents and crime reporting
- Public and private capital improvement investments

Outcome: Downtown buildings and sites with blight or disrepair have been identified and remedied.

- Number of properties with code violations
- Percent of properties in Downtown with code violations
- Map of Downtown properties with known environmental contamination issues
- Map of Downtown abandoned properties and/or “shovel ready” clear sites

Outcome: Downtown facilities provide year-round community programming that is age- and ability-friendly.

- Number of Downtown facilities that offer ongoing community programming for all ages
- Number of participants in Downtown community programming by age range

Outcome: Residential growth Downtown is inclusive of all ages and abilities.

- Demographic profile of residential units in the Downtown overlay districts

